

Easter Sunday 12th April 2020 – Afraid yet filled with joy – Rev Charlie Boyle

In my last sermon I reminded us that in the current circumstances we must try to Let go, take the long view and realise that sometimes God takes us on the long road, so we need to look after what is precious and remember God is with us, and as Paul said last week, let's make up our minds about Jesus and live a life filled with a servant-hearted spirit. Normally on Easter Sunday we would see our Church packed with both children and adults as we come to celebrate and give thanks for Jesus rising from the dead and coming back to life but sadly our doors are closed, yet I hope your hearts are still open to Him.

Today – I want to focus on the passage which speaks of the women being ... **Afraid yet filled with joy.**

I don't know about you but at this present time with the coronavirus going on, like Mary Magdalen and Mary most likely to be the mother of Jesus, I have many mixed emotions. On the one hand, this time is the time to pause, to do things differently, with change being forced upon us, to our normal daily routine. For us as a family it has meant preparing a lot more talks and videos to go online, learning new ways of communicating to the community we serve.

On the other hand, we might be afraid, of catching the virus and dying, or losing loved ones. In our community and Church I am also acutely aware that livelihoods have massively been affected, with many people being made redundant and really suffering, as a result. Of course we at this time pray and praise all the staff who work for our National Health Service, the doctors and nurses on the front line, some of whom may and already have lost their lives, as a result of their care and concern for the ill and dying, many of whom locally are connected to our church, either worshipping here or being closely related to those who are literally on the front line of this battle and current struggle.

This morning we are looking at the resurrection story through the eyes of Matthew. If you haven't already done so then it is worth reading perhaps the whole gospel of Matthew with this extra time we've been given or at the minimum reading verses 1 to 10 of chapter 28, or listening to it read by Emma Blaney on our website – www.allsaintsbh13.church.

This passage represents the folly of unbelief, as the apostle Paul puts it if the resurrection is not true then all Christianity collapses.

Here is the evidence upon which our faith as Christians is based.

Appearances to both guards, women and later the disciples in Galilee. We know of course that women in the time of Jesus and the writing of the gospel author Matthew were less Respected for their opinions, and certainly never in positions of leadership, as they are today. So seeing this passage and hearing these words through women in and of itself is controversial.

Afraid yet filled with joy.

A mere walk on the beach or encounter in the shops, with someone sneezing near you, illustrates this well, with the understandable feeling of not wanting to be around to catch anything.

Some understandable fear is of course gripping the nation at the present time. During this time of

lockdown and the coronavirus upheaval in our society, where we have been encouraged to stay at home, both to protect ourselves as well as the NHS and in turn save lives. Yet the overriding message however of this passage is **do not fear**. Jesus is alive! **We have a phrase in our house... The good news is... Jesus is alive before we share the good or bad news.**

Let's look at this passage of the resurrection story through the eyes of the angels, the guards and the women.

Firstly the angels – **there was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and going to the tomb rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.**

The angel from heaven who had rolled away the stone and said to the women do not be afraid, he has risen! The going on to say **come and see the place where he lay and then go and tell His disciples... He has risen from the dead and is going ahead into Galilee.**

I don't know if you believe in angels, but there are many instances both in the Bible and in my own life of when people have looked after and saved me literally as well as those around me. On my honeymoon in the middle of a very hot day by the coast in Italy, my dear wife Sarah and I were walking down to a beach, on the way back up, she fainted, perhaps because of sunstroke, all I could do was pray, and then within a few minutes a young couple appeared, much better equipped for the heat, arrived with spare water and literally were both an answer to prayer and angels at that time for us.

In the many conversations that I've had over the past couple of weeks, I've been struck by the caring nature of everyone in the community. Whether it be friends, neighbours, loved ones and relations – there seem to be plenty of angels out there, looking after each other. Contrary to the opinion that society seems divided, I would say the opposite, in times of crisis, people seem to be doing exactly what Jesus commanded.

Loving their neighbour

So keep being an angel and give thanks for the angels around you

Next let's think about the **guards**. It is interesting I think that the guards were so afraid verse 4 of **the angel that they shook and became like dead men.**

In this time of crisis and calamity have we become like dead men? How we are feeding ourselves, and I don't mean literally, rushing to the supermarkets, but spiritually ... it is really important. What we watch, what we read during this timeshapes our minds and habits. We are created to be spiritual beings... now like no other time we're responsible for our own spiritual journey.

Have we fallen asleep? Perhaps not being able to go into the church as a building has meant that we have just given up on God, saying our prayers and hearing and reading the Bible.

When we lose our spiritual community in a corporate gathering sense, then we can easily become spiritually dead. It's a bit like

.... the young man who was really struggling in his Christian faith. He had come to faith in Christ, but after a while began drifting away from people, drifting alone, in his doubts and losing his faith. He went to see a wise old man he knew and they sat and chatted beside the coal fire. This young man told this older man about what was going on in his life and the older man didn't say a thing. He just went to the fire picked up some tongs and took a red-hot coal out of the fire and put it down on the hearth. As the young man talked they both watched as the coal went from red-hot to dull and dark. The old man then took the tongs again and put the coal back in the fire. Within a few minutes the coal was red-hot again. He didn't need to say anything. The young man left knowing exactly why his faith had gone dull.

If you've read the story of the passion through Matthew you will know that the disciples vacillate between obedience and disobedience. Doing the right thing and then not ...

I think if we're honest that is probably more like our own walk with God. We have moments of listening to Him, being committed, doing the right thing, being generous, being kind and thinking of others and then moments of being selfish and thoughtless.

If we recall the events of Maundy Thursday - the last supper, when Jesus tells them what is about to happen. At that supper they swear loyalty to Jesus but as soon as Jesus is seized in the garden they flee. And in Peter's case later deny him not once but three times, before the cock crowed, as predicted.

So we should remember the angels, the spiritually dead guards but also the mixed emotions of the women.

Throughout this passage and perhaps our own lives we have a mixture of joy and fear, like both Marys. I think the reality of Christian life is that there is a mixture of faith and doubt, obedience and failure, generosity and meanness, and clearly in the case of the women here in this passage fear and joy.

So the women are central to this passage....afraid yet filled with joy.

I don't know if you know but women are naturally talkative, well certainly in my household but then my wife is outnumbered by 5 to 1...

Did you knowthat according to an article on the BBC called the Prattle of the sexes that Women use an average of **20,000** words a day, compared to the mere **7,000** that men use each day! Women will happily chat for hours on end over the telephone, whereas men can typically be happy in each other's company in silence or just the occasional word.

We see here that they are naturally talkative but also inquisitive. Women are different from men.

You may have read in recent papers or seen on the news, that there is an increase in the use of the domestic violence hotline and with this enforced isolation is likely to increase. ...It is also likely to be marriages that come under strain - so if you would like to join our virtual relationship course, starting on Tuesday 14th April, please do see our website. What better a time could there be to invest time in one of your most important relationships on earth....but back to this resurrection passage for today, where we see that when the women meet Jesus they reached out to him, clasped his feet and

worshipped him. We as Christians need to reach out to each other and those around us.

Did you know that in 2017 a commission on loneliness discovered that more than 9 million people living in Britain today feel lonely and that almost a 1/4 of a million older people hadn't spoken to a friend or family member for a month or so. Of course this loneliness problem is likely to increase during this time of self-isolation. God alone knows what this will mean for the most frail, fearful and vulnerable people but we as a Church and as individuals can continue to encourage each other by a card, letter, email or phone call, what's App or other social media message.

Now women are often seen as emotional and yet we see in them mixed emotions, fear and joy. And as I said earlier I don't know if you have mixed emotions about our current situation but I know I do.

On the one hand it is a great gift of time, I have heard of people cleaning out long lost cupboards, tackling that paperwork, or the overflowing garage, full of clutter, getting rid of stuff and finally tidying up that has been put off for years. For me personally with the family at home and with no evening meetings there has been plenty of time to do those jobs around the house that you never quite get around to doing. But also if I'm honest I'm a bit afraid of what the church will look like in the future, we may lose loved ones, as well as treasured members of Church. People may decide not to come back ...!

However this is also both an opportunity to do things differently...

To take another perspective on life but finally to remember Jesus's words do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me. We later see that Jesus is giving us the opportunity to tell others about him. The great commission at the end of this chapter - [to go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit](#), remains as true today as it did then.

Spider plants illustration – let me show you this plant, which was given to me at Ridley over 10 years ago ...it was like one of these small ones yet now it has spread....that is what we must be like in spreading the love of God and telling people about Jesus to those around us who we love.

We must also remember his promise at the end of Matthew that says "[and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.](#)" This of course refers to when Jesus Christ returns to the Earth. It may well be that we are at the end of our time on earth, some are saying that these are the end times, perhaps this is true and we will see Jesus coming again soon. Alternatively it could be then end of our own earthly lives.

If that is the case then do we know Jesus, have we put our house in order, have we made our will, Have we made our funeral arrangements?

If not we can't say we haven't had the time, we can't say I just didn't get round to it. Maybe that is a choice, we have each been given this gift of time if it is, it is up to us as to what we do with it.

We can spend more time in the garden, if we have one, we can spend more time watching TV, we can spend more time reading or we could spend time turning to Him in scripture and prayer. The choice is ours...

Commitment prayer – sorry for the things I have done wrong in my life and I ask for your forgiveness, thank you Lord for dying on the cross for my sins and mistakes, please come afresh through your Holy Spirit on me, give me more of your love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, we ask this in Jesus' precious name – Amen. Happy Easter!

Remember the sermon said is never the same as the sermon delivered or indeed remembered!